

Vermont State Board of Education
Agency of Education
1 National Life Drive, Davis 5
Montpelier, VT 05620
Submitted Electronically

December 5, 2023

Dear State Board of Education Members:

We write to formally comment on the State Board of Education's proposed amendments to Rule Series 2200 and to give voice to the 90% of our constituents who voted in support of the following resolution by the Taconic & Green Regional School District:

- 1. Because our district does not operate a public high school, students have the opportunity to choose from a variety of public and independent high school options;*
- 2. The electorate does not support the public funding of any school that discriminates against students or staff on the basis of race, creed, color, national origin, disability, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity;*
- 3. The electorate supports the current structure of independent schools having autonomy over their governance and operations within the current regulatory framework. This structure of oversight has enabled our districts to make high school education available, as required by the State of Vermont, while maintaining confidence that the schools serving our students provide a high quality of education; and*
- 4. The electorate opposes efforts to change the current structure in a way that eliminates educational opportunities made possible by our current practice of high school choice. The electorate believes our current local educational system, in a great example of Vermont traditions, has evolved within this current structure, through a high level of community commitment and an appropriate exercise of local control, to provide high quality, equitable educational opportunities for our students.*

The voters in the nine towns within the Taconic & Green district have spoken clearly in opposition to the public funding of schools that discriminate, and in support of our local education system, which provides local students with a choice that includes access to independent schools that are approved, through the rigorous process laid out in Rule Series 2200, to receive public tuition. We support the SBE's proposed amendments to Rule Series 2200, which are consistent with the wishes of our local communities, particularly with regard to strengthening anti-discriminatory practices. We also support the application of ethnic and social equity principles from Act 1 to Rule Series 2200. With this context, we respectfully ask that you do not make more substantive changes the rules than what is proposed in your preliminary draft.

Finally, we ask that you consider two fundamental principles that underpin the accountability of the independent schools that serve the students within our community. First, at an individual level, families have a choice. If a school is not meeting the needs of a student, the family can choose to send their children to another school. In fact, we have many families who choose to send siblings to different schools, because the unique needs of each student can be appropriately matched in different environments. Second, from a systems perspective, if our local independent schools fail to meet the needs of the community, a simple majority vote of the electorate is all that is required to end tuitioning and transition to a model where we operate a public school.

Sincerely,

Representative Kelly Pajala (Windham-Windsor-Bennington)

Representative Seth Bongartz (Bennington-4)

Representative Kathleen James (Bennington-4)

Representative Mike Rice (Bennington-Rutland)